

1. Introduction

This leaflet tells you about all the support that is available to you as a care leaver. Becoming an adult can be a tricky time. Things like leaving school, finding a job, starting a relationship, setting up home and becoming a parent don't always happen in order. We know that it's a big step to move to living on your own. We want to make sure that you feel supported and know where and who to go to for advice and help.

Care leavers helped us design this local offer and we will continue to listen to your views to make sure the services we offer are what you need. We have written this leaflet with a group of care leavers.

To be able to get the support detailed in this leaflet, you must have been in care for at least 13 weeks between the ages of 14 and 16 (including your 16th birthday) or for 13 weeks after your 16th birthday. If you're not sure whether you have, then ask your Personal Adviser.

This leaflet is available online at www.coventry.gov.uk/careleavers you can email ThroughCareService@coventry.gov.uk to request a copy and your personal adviser will talk to you about it.

As a Local Authority we are your Corporate Parents, this may seem like a strange term but it means that Care leavers should expect the same level of care and support that others would expect from a reasonable parent. Through Care helps make sure that care leavers have the opportunities they need, which will include offering you more than one chance as you grapple with taking on the responsibilities of adulthood as we know that not everyone gets it right first time.

2. The support we must give you by law

Personal adviser

- From April 2018 care leavers have the right to a personal adviser up to the age of 25.
- The role of a personal adviser is to help care leavers prepare for independent living and to support them after they leave care.
- Personal advisers are responsible for ensuring that a Pathway Plan is developed and kept up to date for each care leaver.
- We will try and ensure that care leavers keep the same personal adviser where possible.
- Your personal adviser will see you at least once every two months and keep in touch with you between visits.

Pathway Plan

- We will prepare a Pathway Plan for all young people leaving care that sets out how we will help you to achieve the things you want to.
- We will start developing the Pathway Plan while you are still in care – around your 16th birthday.
- We must review your Pathway Plan at least every six months.
- We will ensure you are involved in preparing and reviewing the Pathway Plan.

Care leavers' rights

- You have a right to be involved in all decisions about when you leave care and your plans for leaving care.
- You must be able to let us know what you think of and how you feel about the services they receive.
- You have a right to access independent advocacy support if you want to challenge decisions about the care and support provided by us and we will ensure you have access to this. Currently you can do this through Barnardo's by ringing 02476 372596.
- You have a right to see the information we have has about you, including the records we kept when you were in care.

Leaving care before turning 18

- You can choose to leave care before you turn 18 but we do not encourage this due to you losing some of the benefits you are entitled to whilst in care. The Director of Children's Services must sign off all decisions to allow a 16- or 17-year-old to leave care.

- If you do choose to leave care before you are 18, we will ensure that you are in suitable accommodation and provide you with assistance to meet your needs in relation to education, training or employment as set out in your Pathway Plan.

Support to engage in education, employment or training

We want to make sure every young person leaving care has the support to achieve their goals in life.

The law says we must provide you with assistance with expenses linked with employment, education and training. In particular:

- We will provide you with a Higher Education (HE) bursary of at least £2,000 if you go to University.
- We will provide somewhere for you to stay during University holidays (or funding for this if you would prefer to make your own arrangements) if you are in HE or in residential further education.

3. Other support we offer

As a Council we want our commitment to you to run through everything we do therefore as well as specific support set out below we commit to:

- Ensure any changes to policy that could affect care leavers are evaluated for impact on care leavers.
- Make sure that, suppliers are directed to our equality, diversity and inclusion policy which promotes the importance of prioritising care leavers for opportunities and encourages them to sign up to the national care leavers covenant.
- Provide mentoring opportunities for care leavers from Directors and senior managers within the Council.

Accommodation

If you are aged over 18, your personal adviser will help you to find suitable accommodation. This might involve:

- Working with Housing Services to come up with suitable housing options for you, including supported accommodation if you are not ready or don't want to have your own tenancy.
- Giving you high priority access to social housing in accordance with our housing allocation policy.

- Supporting you in a housing crisis, including offering a 'second chance' if your first move to independence does not work out for you, backdating this to your 16th birthday.
- If this is what you and your foster carers want, supporting you to remain with your foster carers under what's called a 'Staying Put' arrangement. This can last until you are 21 **[Add link to Staying Put policy]**.
- Supporting you to access your setting up home grant that can be used to furnish your first property, this is £2,000.
- Supporting you with moving in to your property, this includes with removals and getting your first week's shopping
- We will provide advice about maintaining a tenancy, including avoiding rent or Council Tax arrears, paying bills etc. This will be both through your Personal Adviser and Independence courses run by Through Care.
- We will exempt you from Council Tax until you are 21 if you are living in Coventry. Or we will pay your Council tax until 21 if we have placed you out of city.
- Coventry will not find any care leavers who are working with us to resolve their situation intentionally homeless.
- All young people preparing to live independently will have the opportunity to spend time in a training flat.

Education, training and employment

We want you to succeed in your education, training and employment. We will ask you how you are doing and be ready to celebrate your achievements with you.

We will support you to access and maintain education, training and employment by offering:

- Carers advisers based within Through Care to provide specialist advice and support with accessing education, training and employment
- Support with transport costs when travelling to training, school/college, apprenticeships or job interviews.
- Support to access your Further education Bursary
- Support to buy equipment, essential clothing, and books.
- Support should you choose to go to university e.g. accessing tuition fee and maintenance loans, travel costs at the start and end of term, paying you a higher education bursary of £2,000 and ensuring that you have suitable accommodation during vacations which we will pay for.
- We will provide ring-fenced opportunities for work experience, apprenticeships and employment in the local authority for you.

- All care leavers doing apprenticeships within Coventry City Council will be paid the national living wage
- We will do all we can to ensure all apprentices secure a permanent role at the end of their apprenticeship
- We will hold an annual celebration events where all your achievements will be celebrated.
- In addition your worker will celebrate your individual achievements in a personal way for example by taking you out for a meal when you finish your A-levels.
- Provide you with incentive money based on attendance in education or training.
- Support in learning to drive to increase your employment opportunities.

Health and Wellbeing

We will support you getting any support you need around your physical and mental health needs by offering:

- A health passport for you when you leave care which will give your health history.
- Signpost you to where you can get help to pay for prescription costs.
- Support you to register at health services when moving home.
- Ensure our CAMHS service runs to 25
- Give you and a guest free access to sports facilities in the city.
- Provide you with transports costs when attending hospital or doctors' appointments.
- We will support provide additional support to you if you are a young parent.
- We will discuss with you at 16 years whether you have needs that might need some ongoing support beyond your 18th birthday and will involve Adult Social Care if this might be needed.

Finances

We have a full financial support package for young people leaving care which is set out in Money Matters

http://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/17107/money_matters in addition to financial support we will also offer:

- Support with budgeting
- Support to access relevant money management courses.
- Support to access a Junior ISA.
- Support to open a bank account.
- Support to gain appropriate identification documents, such as a passport and/or provisional driving licence.
- Support to get NI number.

- Exceptional financial support in emergencies.

Relationships

As well as support from a Personal Adviser, we may be able to offer you additional practical and emotional support, such as through:

- Providing you with a mentor/peer mentor;
- Where appropriate, continuing to support contact with the 'Independent Visitor' you had while you were in care;
- Help to maintain or regain contact with people special to you or who cared for you in the past, like former foster carers or social workers.

Participation in Society

We want our care leavers to be active members of society, and to have all the chances in life that other young adults have. We can help you participate in society in the following ways:

- Providing information on groups and clubs you may wish to join
- Informing you about relevant awards, schemes and competitions you can enter, in line with your talents and interests
- Encouraging and helping you to enrol on the Electoral Register, so you can vote in elections
- Offering work experience with our councillors
- Informing you about voluntary work that we think you may be interested in
- Informing and possibly helping with the cost of leisure activities
- Giving you advice and helping you to challenge any discrimination you face as a care leaver.

4. Who can help?

Key contact numbers for:

- Personal adviser
- Care leaving team
- Housing advice
- Designated doctors/nurses

- Education, employment or training support
- Local authority leadership e.g. the Director of Children's Services, Lead Member
- Voices of Care

Other places you can go for help:

- Princes Trust
- The Rees Foundation
- Care Leavers' Foundation

Relevant universal services. This might include links to or contacts for:

- Health services such as sexual health clinics and drug/alcohol support
- Information about further or higher education
- Relevant youth clubs/groups/activities
- Parenting support groups
- Youth Offending Team
- Citizenship Advice Bureau